

The Pocket Universe Traveler's Guide to Muncie, Indiana

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Being a student at Ball State University (BSU) in Muncie, Indiana, puts one right in the heart of Middletown; likewise, Muncie has been heavily-studied by anthropologists and cultural centers alike. However, even with the interest in Muncie, the town is generally portrayed by BSU students and outsiders alike as a “dirty” town with a small, uneducated population. Art does not thrive there, nor does academics outside of Ball State. Analyzing the town with different models such as research, art, and creative writing allows for the hidden beauties that are Muncie’s landmarks to be glorified. In this creative project, different landmarks in Muncie’s vicinity (including on Ball State University’s campus) are viewed through different lens on the aforementioned models to create a more colorful, comprehensive understanding of the town and its culture.

Acknowledgements

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I would also like to show gratitude to the committee viewing this selection, including **Dr. John Emert** and **Dr. Amy Livingstone**.

In Spring 2018, I participated in a trip-oriented colloquial class with Dr. Timothy Berg and Dr. Jason Powell and its final project was the inspiration for this thesis. Thank you, **Dr. Timothy**

Berg and Dr. Jason Powell, for allowing me the joy to first create this idea in your collaborated classroom.

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Most importantly, none of this could have happened without my family. My **mother**, who is my best friend and best guide, offered to be a soundboard for the first iteration of this project and assisted in buying materials. My **father**, with his pride for his only daughter, allowed me to say “no” to family outings in order to fully invest into this project. My only and oldest **brother**, with all of his fantastical, cynical leanings, inspired me to think above and beyond. Without my family, I would have never developed the hard-working ethic or intense imagination needed.

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Process Analysis Statement

For this project, the idea was to take familiar Muncie landmarks and present them in a way that's new and interesting to the audience— anyone who's interested in Muncie would find something they enjoy in this piece, hopefully.

Like mentioned in a later piece titled, "How to Be a Pocket Universe Traveler," the process for making a book is kind of a reflective/meditative one: go to the landmark and/or do some research on it. From there, do whatever "model" of expression inspires you and take note of it, even if it seems out of this world... From there, you've found a pocket universe! Anything is possible in a pocket universe. I simply kept my computer/phone on me and recorded it all in Google Docs for a seamless ability to move from work to work and so my thesis advisor Prof. Day could constantly have an idea of where I was at in this endeavor.

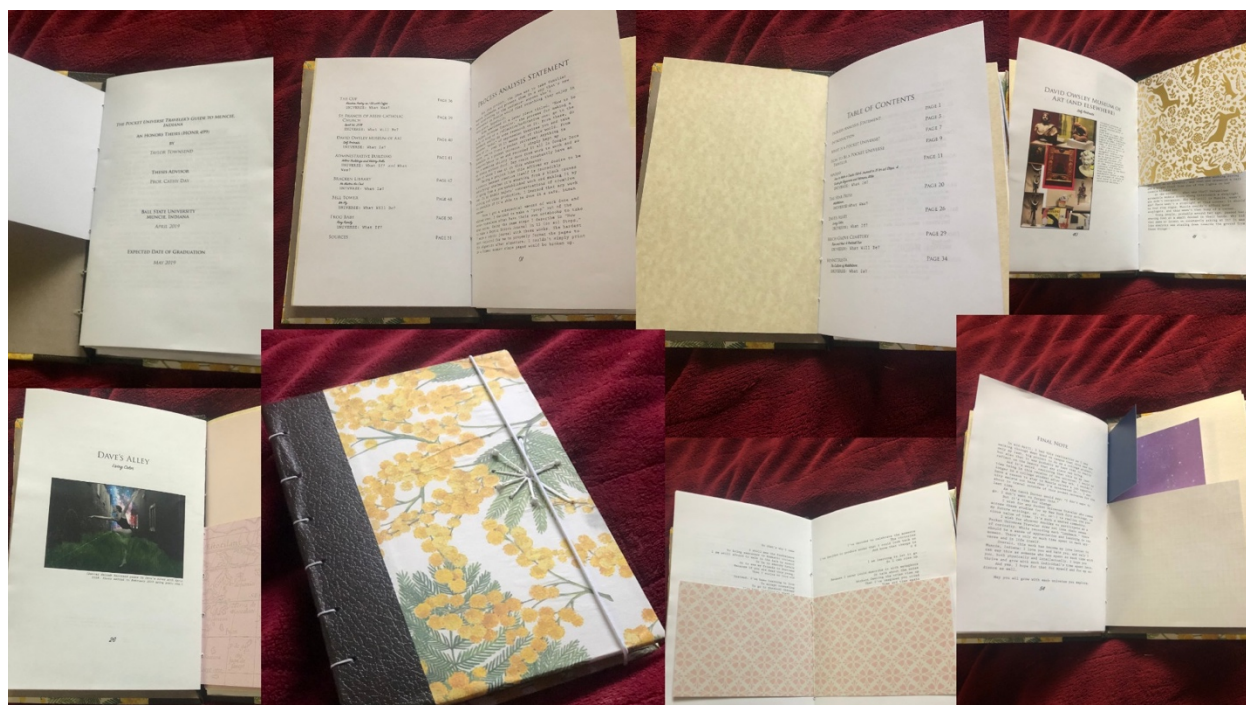
Having a project like this affirms my desire to be a creator because creation itself is incredibly satisfying— whether it's starting from a blank canvas or going from a pre-established work and making it my own. In my double majors' concentrations of creative writing and video production, I learned that any work is possible if it's able to be done in a safe, human manner.

Once I got a substantial amount of work done and edited over, I decided to make a "prop" out of the work— travelers often have their own notebooks to take down notes. Using the same steps I describe in "How to Make a Coptic Stitch Journal in 15 (or so) Steps," I made a coptic journal with these works. The hardest part required for me to properly format the pages to fit signature after signature; I couldn't simply print in a linear manner since pages would be broken up.

Overall, the result of this project has created a fun artifact that I can proudly say represents both the good and the bad of Muncie, IN, as well as represents my own personal

journal as an undergraduate student here. It shows a holistic approach to the town and makes it look like any other town rather than the stereotypes presented by the students and media alike. With this amount of work, I hope to continue this project in the future to encapsulate more of its landmarks to create a rounder picture of the community.

Pictures of completed artifact



(This artifact was made with a scrapped cover from Book Arts Collaborative with a marigold-based decorated paper and faux leather binding. White, unwaxed linen thread was used to put the book together in combination of printer paper, decorated paper, and cardstock on the inside. Written/art pieces were broken up with colorful “scraps” to create more writing space for future projects about Muncie. Likewise, an additional signature was added at the end with all-purpose sketchbook paper to continue this project in the future, if inspired. Outside of the smaller-sized scarps, this book resulted in 78 pages of information.)

Introduction

It started with a play I wrote during my senior year of high school.

Of course it started with high school. It seems like everything started in high school.

Dreams, first loves, first big failures, college successes...

This was just a *play*. Not a success nor a failure. I just wanted to submit it to a contest and get it published by this cool play-publishing company. And of course, I was rejected. My writing life continued on as normal.

That's just it, though— only my writing life remained normal. (Were any kinds of writing lives even normal in the first place, though?) It was through that I discovered the pocket universe theory.

Many have worked on developing the idea, but the gist of the theory is that there is more than one universe— all in their own little bubbles. All of the stories present in each bubble are completely different from each other. Different people, different outcomes, different places entirely— all in this little bubble, so close yet so far.

But what if you were a pocket universe traveler?

Okay, it's so crazy to think that anyone could be a pocket universe traveler— *but hear me out*. It's not as crazy as it seems. Pocket universes are all about the *was, is, will be, and can be*. The past, present, and future of all points of life. It's all about seeing the world as *potential* rather than certainty, if that makes sense. Each life is not certain— if I'm being quite honest, even if it's a bit dark— but it's *potential*. It's about the unlimited amount of possibilities available to each and every person... pocket universes, if you will.

Some say that this is an example of *sonder*, a word that encapsulates the realization that everyone has a completely different life outside of yours— you are *not* the universe. It is a blessing and a misery to be completely aware.

(Which, if I'm honest, probably explains some of my anxiety.)

Every part of Muncie— of Middletown, every block and every street and every corner has its own timeline. The people on it has their own stories— their own potential to go to any way of life. Each landmark has a story with a potentiality to it.

Now you're aware of it and part of the Pocket Universe Travelers' Society. (You're welcome.)

As you travel around Muncie, as you read this journal, I ask that you try to do one thing: Open up your eyes to the world— not just your world, or our world, or anything that is cozy and easy and secure. It's hopeful and crazy and full of life and we will never understand it's dangerous, destructive nature.

Once you start to open up, you will begin to see what Was, Is, Will Be, and Should Be. We hope you enjoy the complimentary comments that will accompany you on your travels.

What is a Pocket Universe?

"[Physicist] Alan Guth [of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology] coined the name 'pocket universe,' meaning a pocket of space, a region of space, over which the environment is uniform, the laws of nature are uniform, the constants of nature are uniform, and that these pockets of space are more or less identifiable with the things that we used to call the Universe, with a capital U. So we now need a plural for the concept if we believe that space is filled like a crazy quilt of environments with different properties and different laws of physics," physicist Leonard Susskind explains in a meeting for the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2005¹. Susskind is one of the fathers of string theory and is considering the fact that there may be pocket universes possible, since we cannot see outside of our own universe.

It's a quietly-debated theory in the science community about whether or not there are universes beyond our understanding because we simply *cannot see them*. For all we know, these universes have completely different rules to our own.

Guth continues on to explain *cosmic inflation*, which is a model he came up with to explain the theory's origin. In essence, it says that when the universe stopped expanding exponentially, the traditional Big Bang we know and understand occurred. According to cosmic inflation, the expansion kept happening, even with sectors of a false-vacuum space (which a tunnel is lower state energy, but not at the lowest state of energy in that area. It is generally considered more unstable, but the vacuum itself will make it last longer) decaying at a faster rate. These "pockets" in the expansion creates bubbles, which the theory then says created *pocket universes*.

¹ Levy, Dawn. "String Theorist Explores Dark Energy, 'Pocket Universes'." *Stanford University*, Stanford University, 25 Feb. 2005, news.stanford.edu/news/2005/march2/aaas_susskindsr-030205.html.

Alex Vilenkin, a cosmologist at Tufts University in Massachusetts, explained that because “the space between these bubble or pocket universes is expanding very fast, room is being made for new bubbles to form, so there will be an unlimited number of pocket universes formed in the course of inflation.”²

What does that mean for pocket universes? Well, since the universes are expanding very fast and *new* universes are being formed at a even faster rate, we don’t even know when the creation (or death of pocket universes) will end.

So all of those shows and films that talk about a multiverse/pocket universe being a thing? It’s definitely possible! Marvel’s multiverse definitely makes sense. The Doctor being able to travel across space and time makes sense—³

Actually, who knows? Maybe the Doctor is the first public Pocket Universe Traveler and we don’t even realize it...

² Kuhn, Robert Lawrence. “Confronting the Multiverse: What ‘Infinite Universes’ Would Mean.” *Space.com*, Space, 23 Dec. 2015, www.space.com/31465-is-our-universe-just-one-of-many-in-a-multiverse.html.

³ Marvel is a comic and cinematic supplier for superheroes’ stories— and, with different iterations of superheroes such as Spider-Man, a multiverse set up was useful. Likewise, the Doctor is a character from the BBC channel’s show *Doctor Who*, where an alien with a spaceship disguised as a blue telephone box has the ability to move through time and space.

How to Be a Pocket Universe Traveler

Observe the area around you. What do you see? Hear? Taste? Touch? Smell? Use all five senses to get a grasp on the reality that is in front of you, no matter how foreign it feels.

Now that you have a better grasp of what is around you, what do you *see*? What's the first thing that comes to mind when you're in the experience of this place? What's your mind's eye telling you? It doesn't have to make sense, and it doesn't have to have a specific form.

Record it! It's not observation until it's written down.

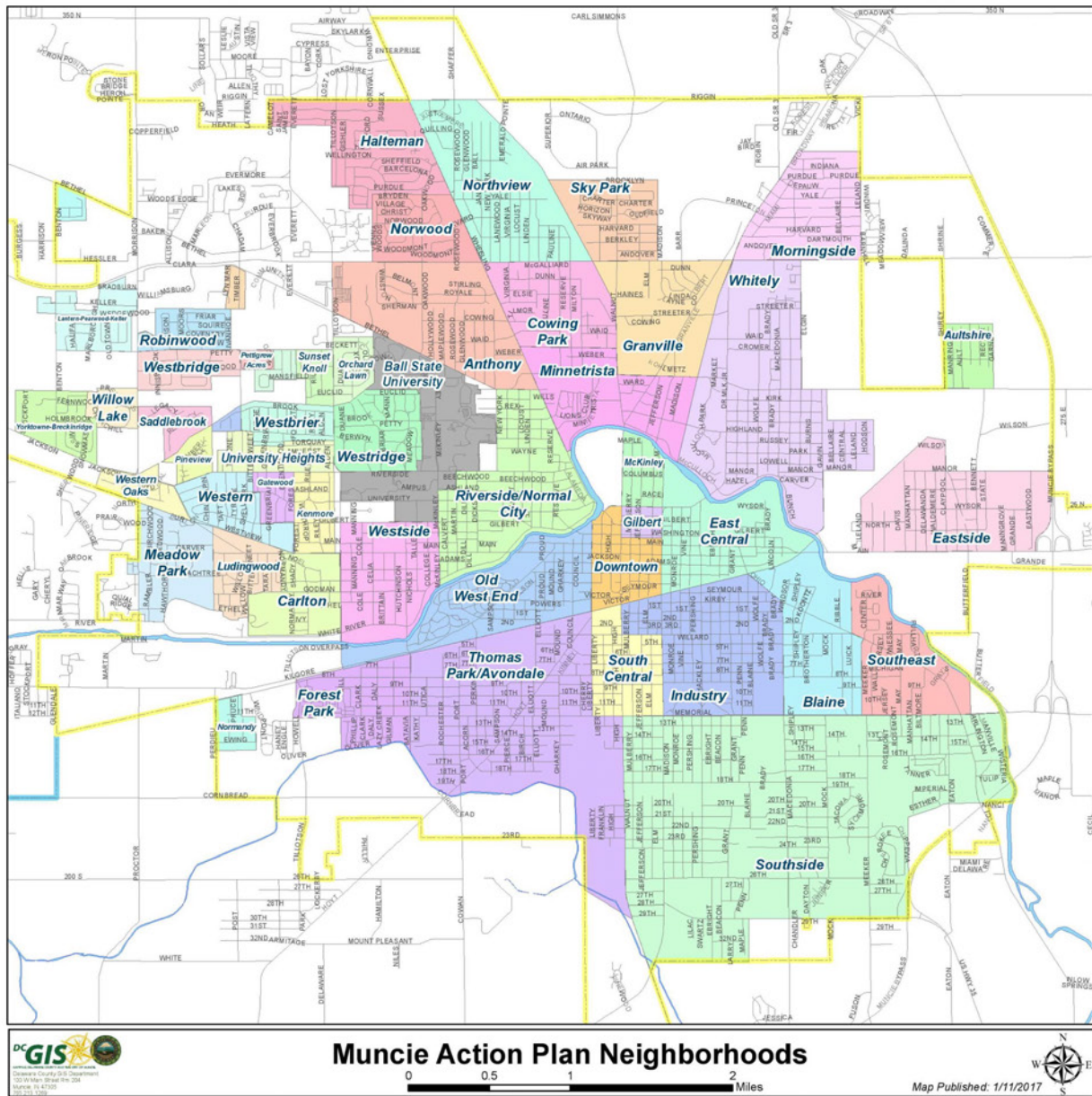
After you're done, take note of what you wrote down. Is there some kind of pattern or theme following your thoughts and/or observations? This is the individual pocket universe revealing itself to you.

(And, in reality, since we're travelers and don't stay for very long in one universe or another, it's possible that you may not understand or really have a grasp on the differences between different universes. That's perfectly fine! Everyone has a different kind of thought process and a different perception of reality.)

Now that you've discovered this pocket universe— this new *possibility*— name it! That's the best part. It's very possible that you're the very first person to discover this new place.

For the ease of all of the newcomers who may be discovering their skills as Pocket Universe Travelers for the first time, there will be blank pages in your own guides that will take time to fill in. But realize that this is part of the process- no discoveries are made in an hour.

Map of Muncie, Indiana⁴



⁴ Muncie Neighborhoods, City of Muncie, www.muncienighborhoods.org/resources/maps/.

Madjax

UNIVERSE: What Is?

How to Make a Coptic Stitch Journal in 15 (or so) steps

A Guide for Beginners and Veterans Alike

A coptic stitch journal/notebook/sketchbook is a perfect project for bookbinders of all backgrounds. It provides a way for one to become assimilated with the “in,” “out,” and “looping” motions that occur with different stitches.

If done properly, the sketchbook will have an exposed spine showing off the proud sewing done by the binder, sometimes even showing off a word or design on the spine. When the sketchbook is opened, it will lay flat on the table, allowing the user to utilize both pages in a cohesive manner.

PRODUCT: one (1) journal

ESTIMATED TIME: if materials are prepared beforehand, then four (4) hours maximum

If preparation is necessary, then around 5-6 hours maximum

ITEMS

- One (1) davey board, cut in half
- Enough cover paper to fashionably cover your board and make book covers
- Book glue to glue the paper onto the board
- In a general sense, enough paper to create twelve (12) signatures with four (4) sheets in each signature
- An awl for piercing signatures

- A bone folder to fold pages
- About fourteen (14) board-long lengths of waxed thread
- A curved needle (preferably; a straight needle will do fine, however)
- A lot of patience, if this is your first time

TUTORIAL

1. Make your boards pretty

Take your cover paper, cut to appropriate size and your book blue and have fun covering your two pieces of davey board! The more artistically stylized to your taste, the better.

NOTE: The entirety of the davey board should be covered unless there is reason to not do so, like artist integrity. The entirety of the board will be seen when used, so better to show off your skills with glue.

2. Make your signatures

Depending on your paper and davey board sizes, you may need to trim to appropriate size, but in the end, you should have a gathering of 4 papers per group— a signature— that is ready to be used. There should be 12 signatures, creating a total of 36 pieces total. Be prepared to freak out if there are any pencil markings, scuffings, etc. Keep a eraser nearby if you are anal about your paper quality. Shrug if you are just excited to make this journal.

Then, use the bone folder to fold the signatures from end-to-end, width-wise, to create one fold across the four pages in the signature. When stacked together, the signatures will look like a coverless book; this is absolutely how it should be.

3. Line everything up

Keeping the signatures stacked up, go ahead and put your prettily-decorated covers on each side of this stack to represent a book. Make sure it's as straight as a lamppost.

4. Mark your thread lines

Taking a pencil, mark up where your thread will go in and out of each signature and the covers. If you are doing a designed spine, such as with words or geographic shapes, be sure to take the intricacies that the design may require in your stitching. Be aware that your work time will take longer the more complicated this design looks.

5. Question your sanity and check

Does this *really* work? Run it through your head.

6. Create binding holes

Taking your awl, pierce each and every mark you made on the board and on the signatures. Again, depending on how much time you spent marking, this may make you question your sanity, which is included in the next step.

7. Question your sanity and recheck again

You've already made the holes, but... Does this *really, actually* work? Stare at the unfamiliar holes for several minutes before anxiously accepting it.

8. Thread your needle

Taking your long line of waxed thread, thread your needle. If you can't get it after many attempts, take advantage of the waxy texture and "flatten" the end of the thread with your thumb and forefinger to create an easier shape to push through the eye of your needle. If that doesn't work, use the little Native American-marked thread assistant tool that is in every granny's sewing kit.

9. Start your first stitch

Position the beautiful cover laying down with the signature on top of it and open. Go to the lowest hole on the bottom of the signature (wherever you put it). Pierce your needle through it. Just do it and breathe out when the needle shows up on the other side. Loop your thread over the outside of the cover's spine. Come up through the corresponding hole in the bottom cover. Give yourself a high-five when you see your work coming to life.

10. Continue attaching your first signature to the board

Loop your thread back into the first hole you did in your signature. Once nicely re-acquainted with your signature, take your needle and take it through the next hole in the line you made by folding the signatures previously. Do the same with each hole in your signature and cover until you get to the last hole— do everything except returning to the inside of the signature.

11. Attach second signature

Continuing from the step, instead take your second signature and place it on top of your stitched-up beauty, lining up each hole. Take your needle and insert it into the appropriate hole in the second signature. Inside the second signature, move to the second hole in the second signature and start your second stitch of the second stack of papers.

Since a loop has been created by your first attachments, when you go out of the signature, use your needle to “tuck” under the loop or go under it to appear on the opposite side. Go back up into the corresponding hole into the signature and continue on in this pattern.

12. Keep adding signatures

After the last hole, follow the motion of going up into the third signature instead of back into the last hole. Follow this attachment process throughout your signatures up until your last signature and second davey board cover.

Enjoy the madness. Be careful not to get *too* crazy and rip a hole in the pages, though.

Question your sanity the whole time.

13. Attach cover with last signature

Before attaching your last signature, sigh at the craziness that comes next. You have to *attach the last signature and cover as it is one entity*. If this does not make sense, reference online resources and continue to be confused. Try and re-try several times until you get it. Cry, maybe. Let the tears wash out the previously-made scuff marks by dirty fingers.

14. Tie together and cut excess

YOU FIGURED IT OUT. HALLELUJAH. Wherever your thread ends up, tie it close to the source once, twice, three times if you're superstitious. Cut off whatever's left after that.

15. TA-DA!

Now stare at your work of art and try to figure out if this is the next journal you will write in or if it will join the many others you have made and/or bought.

The Star Press

UNIVERSE: What Was?

Middletown

HEADLINE: Middletown is Like Any Other Town

“This time I’m going to Muncie, Indiana... I’m hoping that this trip will give some insight into what Americans appear to find alienating about their political establishment. I also want to ask: what is peculiarly American about this moment? How many similarities are there between here and Brexit Britain, or a France where the Front National is a serious contender for the presidency?”⁵

Gary Younge, a reporter for British news platform The Guardian, has made several trips to Muncie, Indiana, to see what a truly “normal” town in America looks like. However, just like many Americans would expect, there isn’t a “normal” town to base America’s culture off of:

“I don’t know that I’d call Muncie typical – what place truly is? – but it certainly showcased America as a complex place. True, the sign for the local mosque was destroyed and one local preacher held a memorial service in which he refused to share the pulpit with Muslims, Jews or any other religion. But following the mosque incident a local Muslim man held a barbecue and 200 neighbours showed up; an alternative interfaith service attracted twice the number of participants as the Christian-only one.

“So I’m back in Middletown in the hope that I will once again find that level of complexity and nuance in this volatile moment.”⁵

However, even if that is the case, Muncie still has speculation upon speculation. There were books titled *Middletown* that portrayed different parts of life, including the six facets of

⁵ Younge, Gary. “The View from Middletown: Join Gary Younge for a Unique Look at the US Election.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 11 Oct. 2016, www.theguardian.com/membership/2016/oct/11/middletown-gary-younge-us-election-presidential-muncie-indiana.

work, home and family, youth, leisure time, religious activities, government and community.

Muncie, however, was never mentioned: “[Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, the authors of the *Middletown* books] didn’t tell anyone it was Muncie. They just called it Middletown.”⁶

It’s almost easy to see why. The median household income is \$32,500, compared to Indiana’s median household income of \$52,314.⁷ In short, the people are not doing well. Having a city that is supposed to be the representative of America fail does not look good on the U.S.

Perhaps this is because of the economic community; a lack of industry has Muncie in a chokehold. Originally being a factory town for automotives and other giants, other larger cities such as Fort Wayne and Indianapolis have stolen factories and employees alike. Large industries bring money into the local economy. Lack of funding has affected not only the school systems, but the rest of the community as well.

Let’s stop hating on Muncie. They are trying as hard as they can.

There are fewer meth labs in Muncie, but meth and heroin use is increasing.⁸

Muncie is not special in this case, either.

It’s Middletown, the epitome of an “average” Midwest town—

Assuming that the Midwest is the epitome of classic American culture, of course.

Why keep the media going there? Why have anything but local news featured there?

⁶ Younge, Gary. “The View from Middletown: a Typical US City That Never Did Exist.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 18 Oct. 2016, www.theguardian.com/membership/2016/oct/18/view-from-middletown-us-muncie-america.

⁷ “Muncie, Indiana.” *Muncie, Indiana (IN) Profile: Population, Maps, Real Estate, Averages, Homes, Statistics, Relocation, Travel, Jobs, Hospitals, Schools, Crime, Moving, Houses, News, Sex Offenders*, www.city-data.com/city/Muncie-Indiana.html.

⁸ “Muncie Sees First Suspected Meth Lab in a Long Time.” *FOX59*, 28 Feb. 2019, fox59.com/2019/02/28/muncie-sees-first-suspected-meth-lab-in-a-long-time/.

Younge believes that even in the tense climate of current politics that there's something wonderful to be uncovered in a town like Muncie, Indiana, where locals are more likely to be Republicans and college faculty and students Democrats. The divide is so clear that it can be cut with a knife and the blade would still be clean after the fact.

However, because it's so "average," Muncie also represents something that a majority of the United State's largest cities cannot show: consistency. New York City's almost 9 million people blend into this Melting Pot they've made for themselves. Los Angeles and its 4 million people show the variety of dreams. But Muncie shows what life is like before you see diversity and dreams. It shows the struggles of life and how to overcome them, even if its not a perfectly-balanced situation.

According to Fox, reports show that even in though there are fewer meth labs than ever in Muncie, there has been a rise in meth and heroin use, with the meth just being brought in from international locations or California. ⁷ Or, even more, history shows the rise and fall of Muncie, IN. Once an industrial giant, Muncie was home to the Ball Brothers and their jar factory, Chevy manufacturing facilities, and the Borg Warner Factory. Now there lies, at the most, skeletons of factories and job creators.

Even then, however, Muncie continues to find ways to shift itself into what the community needs. Although Muncie would be considered a impoverished city, with its median income being a considerable \$20,000 less than the state's median income, there are still very notable achievements here. Ball State University continues to provide to its communities through its immersive classes and other projects and programs. Despite the leadership changes that Muncie Community Schools had undergone last year, such as with Ball State University taking over administrative duties, student enrollment stood at 5,068 students for the 2018-2019 season,

which is only 0.9 percent less than the year before, but much better than the projection of 4,850 students.⁹

So again: why keep the news in Muncie? Why report about this little, impoverished town?

This town portrays a tale that many Americans can understand. It shows the education is not perfect, that communities are not perfect, and that life can constantly change back and forth to reflect the times.

After all, what kind of town doesn't have some kind of event and statistic that they're not proud of?

⁹ Slabaugh, Seth. "'Hugely Positive' News about Muncie School Enrollment." *TheStarPress*, Muncie Star Press, 26 Sept. 2018, www.thestarpress.com/story/news/education/2018/09/26/hugely-positive-news-muncie-school-enrollment/1430848002/

Dave's Alley
UNIVERSE: What If?

Living Color



(Dancer model Hannah Bertrand poses in Dave's Alley in April 2018. Photo edited in February 2019 using pixlr.com.)

Beech Grove Cemetery

UNIVERSE: What Will Be?

Then and Now

A Poetical Duo

March 11th, 2018. 3am.

It has been 3 months and 15 days since you have been gone
And I still don't have the courage to write a poem about it
I guess that's why I'm here.

Instead, I've been writing poems about the poop emoji
About how busy I am
About the integrity of bridges
I've written stories about a monster in the dishwasher
About a woman returning to her hometown
About a dog that's the size of a skyscraper

Instead, I've been avoiding coming here.

Because I can't write a poem about you
I still don't have the courage to write a poem about it

And sometimes I wonder if it'd be easier to talk about
If I made the situation a metaphor
What if my okay days were internal clouds of grey?
Cloudy with a chance of laughter?

And what if my fine days were mildly blue?
The sun peeks out from almost-white clouds
And in those moments,
I almost wonder if I'm starting to heal again

But then there'd be my bad days
Thunderstorms roll in the back of my mind
Thought upon thought is a strike of lightning against my will to stand
It's advised that during a storm to seek shelter
But didn't anyone ever realize
that the best time to sit outside was during a summer storm?

Yet the metaphors never make it easier to explain
I'm still met with soft voices of sympathy
Or louder voices of ignorance
And my own voice is cracking
And no one can find the words possible to fix this
But we're all talking because there's nothing else to do

It's been said that if you leave the silence out long enough
Someone will come back to fill in the space with noise
But frankly, if I'm honest
All I've been hearing is noise lately
I've been counting the days
The anniversaries
The birthdays they won't get to see
I've been watching the family travel
Finding themselves
Following the daughters' footsteps to see if there's anything new to find

Because once death occurs,
It's all old news

Until you start to hear the noise
The days
The anniversaries
The birthdays

And then every day is something new
Of a new heartbreak
And I am left on the sidelines
Too afraid to write the poem
Because I still don't have the courage to write a poem about it

I know that the moment I open my mouth
All that comes out is noise
The strangled sound of a person now changed
Something is new
Because the courage I used to have is now gone
I used to stand out in the middle of summer storms
I used to celebrate the days
The anniversaries

The birthdays

I used to write poems because I could explain it easier with metaphors

But for this-- metaphors don't make it easier

Poems don't make it easier

My voice is still cracking

3 months and 15 days later

It has been 3 months and 15 days since you were killed

And I still don't have the courage to write a poem about it

I know the moment I start writing about it

All I'll have left is the noise in my head

And I don't have the courage to face that.

April 10th, 2019. 12:16pm.

It has been 135 days since the one-year anniversary of your murder

And I am learning to let it go

So that's why I came

I still see the fundraisers

To bring awareness to domestic violence

I am still afraid to walk in the dark by myself

Or be in sketchy hotels

Or to see my friends in distress

Because if you are dead this young,

Then I strive to live old

Instead, I've been learning to live

To accept counseling

To go to physical therapy

I've been learning to speak up

So I don't bury myself under

This grave that you've been in for 460 days now

I am learning to let it go

So I can rise up from whatever death I've been playing with

I've been learning to open my eyes
 To the culture of death I've been living in
 That my depressed brain chemicals had readily accepted
 That had counted the death days
 Birthdays
 Anniversaries
 That no one wanted to see

I've learned to walk away from the poetry
 That I can't bring myself to change
 To edit
 Because once they were released to the air
 All they became was oxygen to
 An effigy to the events I cannot change
 To the depression that's more than just a season
 To the feelings that will always remain

Instead
 I've decided to celebrate the moments
 The victories
 I've decided to produce works that I could look back on
 And know that change is
 O K

I am learning to let it go
 So I can rise up

Because I never could describe it with metaphors
 Or talk about the noise
 Without feeling the cries rise up
 That I've imagined you cried
 Time and time again
 As you left this world
 Without me feeling like
 All I could do was cry as well

But I hope you had found peace here
 When it was all over

Because 460 days later
I still wonder

It had been 135 days since the one-year anniversary of your murder
And I am still reeling
Even if I am
Doing better

But I am here
In this cemetery

I hope you enjoy daisies.

Minnetrista

UNIVERSE: What Is?

The Culture of Middletown

“Minnetrista is a museum center for cultural exploration. We offer exhibits and programs for children, families, adults, scouts, teachers, and students that focus on nature, history, gardens, and art... We envision a thriving community where people who call this region home take pride in its accomplishments and aspire to a brighter future. (Excerpted and adapted from quotes by Ed Ball)... Minnetrista is the home of the Ball Jar; a gathering place and catalyst for community engagement. We create shared experiences that connect people, leading to a better quality of life.”¹⁰

Estimated population as of July 2017: 68,625¹¹

Caucasian citizens: 83.0% (or about 56,959)₁₁

Veterans: 3,541 (or about 19.38%) (46.5% of veterans are from the Vietnam War)₁₁

Percentage of citizens with a bachelor’s degree or higher: 23.6% (or about 16,196)₁₁

I decided that I would not stay in Muncie after graduation, but I knew I would miss it.

As I walked through Minnetrista with a friend, the sun shined a bright, golden orange, settling over old stone buildings and newer skyscrapers in the distance. Yellow, newly-bloomed tulips wiggled in anticipation with its final gasp of sunlight before resting for the quickly-cooling nights.

The sidewalk cracked underneath our feet as we continued on, white and black sneakers alike being the one live thing left on this concrete.

¹⁰ “Minnetrista » Vision, Mission & Values.” *Minnetrista*, minnetrista.net/home/about-minnetrista/vision-mission-values/.

¹¹ United. “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Muncie City, Indiana.” *Census Bureau QuickFacts*, United States Census Bureau, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/munciecityindiana/PST045217.

“I think I’m going back home in May,” Kayley started, her own golden hair representing a beautiful springtime halo, “I want to live with my family again.”

What? I looked over at her with confusion. “What about your server job here in town? Didn’t you love it?”

“Of course I did.” A right turn took us down some new, green walkways. “But there’s nothing here in Muncie. I’m going to find more in Indianapolis with my degree.”

Maybe that was true; the vacancy signs we had passed previously while downtown showed other newly-escaped businesses. I couldn’t help but see my own name up on a window, though. “You think so?”

A nod from her and a frown from me. “Yeah... I think. No one here wants an exercise major to work—”

“Except for all of the population wanting more businesses in general.”

“Other people will stay and make a business. I don’t even know what I want to do in life.”

“So does the other million people who live in Indy.”

On the other side of the upcoming road, colorful buildings lined up down a booming street. “I’m sure it’ll be fine. No one stays here in Muncie, anyway.”

A family with five children cross the road in front of us. On the other side, an older lady tending her garden waves with a gapless smile.

“Maybe...”

On the bridge we stood, water continued to roar on underneath us.

A copy of someone’s manuscript was caught on the rocks, soaking wet.

The Cup

UNIVERSE: What Was?

Random Poetry as I Sit with Coffee

20m passed
And I am still sitting here
Wondering if someone will notice
If I've been stood up
By someone who wanted
To buy my coffee for me

(x)

Celebrate the art
Enjoy the delicious food
Don't tell me it sucks

(x)

Why is it that every cup of coffee
Is a vessel for poetry?

I have a theory:

A man once told me
It was a vessel to awaken
Awake my mind
Awake my soul
Enough to keep me writing

St. Francis Catholic Church
UNIVERSE: What Will Be?

April 1st, 2018

Like Jesus,
I died in March.
But I am still rising
Reaching for stars
And clouds
And all that I cannot see
Wait three days and
I may be gone again

But at least you can say
You've seen the beginning
Of the next comeback story.



David Owsley Museum of Art
(and elsewhere)
UNIVERSE: What Is?

Self Portraits

(Original pictures of artwork found in DOMA and at various parts on campus.

From left to right: Bust of Jesus portrayed like Zeus in DOMA, a meditative figure in DOMA, a Native American portrait from DOMA, a self-portrait in a 200+ year-old mirror in DOMA, a picture of SpongeBob licking a bust which was airdropped to me in Spring 2017, two combined pictures of a shiny metallic sculpture in DOMA, a pumpkin spice container with plastic flowers found in the North Quad building, a meditative statue in DOMA, two pictures of canvas-ed work found in the Art & Journalism building.)

Admin Building

UNIVERSE: What If *and* What Was?

Yellow Buildings and Victory Rolls: Young Woman Lost in Time

This was certainly terrifying.

Achy eyes fluttered open when a chilled breeze brushed across her bare arms, causing hairs and goosebumps to rise. Beneath her, soggy leaves clung to the back of her blouse and skirt. The cold was enough for the short hairs underneath her panty hose to stick up. This must've been the remains of the last rainstorm they had; it'd explain the grey sky above her as well.

When Teresa finally pushed herself up into a sitting position, tangled hair from a now-defeated, previously perfect curl fell down in front of her vision. Her vision of unfamiliar contraptions was blocked by her own curly hair. Some scratchy, pointy twig kept poking her in the back of the head.

Her hand pushed back the stray strands and Teresa studied at the yellow bricks staring back at her.

The yellow bricks is what she recognized but the rest of her surroundings? Nothing was familiar. How did she get on the ground, anyhow? She was working during her shift as an operator, and then she answered a call and a bright flash from one of the lights on her console blinded her--

At the corner... what was that? Unfamiliar automobile models drove along underneath a stoplight she didn't recognize. She was still in Muncie, wasn't she? There wasn't a stoplight at this corner; it should be four stop signs. Muncie couldn't afford many stoplights, and this wasn't that busy of a corner.

Young people, probably around her age, passed her, staring down at a small doodad in their hands. Why did they seem so intent on constantly poking at it? It was like everyone was staring down towards the ground from these things--

Was that a lady wearing pants? Good God! Were women so focused on helping the U.S. in the Second Great War that they've become desperate enough to wear their husband's clothing while they were fighting overseas? A refined lady wore skirts, still, unless she was working.

One of the pantsed women looked over at her, only to give a stare at Teresa's look of astonishment and grimace.

Or really, what was with the short hair? This was a *woman* with boyish hair? Is she a dyk--

Those two had unnatural hair! Colorful hair! Half-shaved and bluer than the murky sky overhead. Oh God, she could faint right here--

One sweaty palm gripped at her heavy, navy-colored skirt, as it continuously shook in tandem with her kneecaps. The other hand wiped at her forehead, the skin clammy and cold.

Where was she supposed to go now? Obviously, someone had kidnapped her and placed her in Hell. Yes! That's where she was.

It seemed like Hell, anyway. It sure smelt like what she imagined Hell to be like, at least, with a skunk-like smell lingering somewhere nearby. What kind of civilized place smelt like skunk? Everyone here seemed to be completely different too; it was different from the home that she knew and was familiar with. Surely all civilized people seem to be dressed like she was? She had to get back to them.

"Hey, are you okay? You look like you could start crying right now." All Teresa could stare at was the strands of blue hair on the weird-looking woman's head.

Oh... well. Apparently the strangers here could speak. Teresa had to admit that these odd-looking citizens were well-read, if they could converse with her; well, she would give them credit, if she could stop her thoughts from racing. Blue and red hair stared at her. How did men get red hair that matched the color of a stop sign? It didn't make sense.

"I-- well-- please don't hurt me!" Teresa held up her hands in surrender and bowed her head. "I'm just a telephone operator, I-- I don't even know how I got here!"

The two strangers shared an expression. Furrowed eyebrows on the blue-haired's face certainly meant that they were going to take her in for interrogation, didn't it? Did the fiery red-haired lady agree with him?

She was certainly reaching out to Teresa as if to kidnap her. This couldn't happen! Teresa needed to go home! Frightened but powered by newfound adrenaline, Teresa scrambled up and held onto her skirt with shaking hands.

"Again, are you okay? You're just on Ball State's campus--"

Ball State? As in Ball State Teachers College? This certainly couldn't be it; there were too many buildings around. Everyone looked different than her. Muncie was too small of a town for anyone to look different from each other. This had to be a form of Muncie in an uncivilized place-- or Hell. That was still a possibility. She wasn't sure which one of them were more likely by this point.

"Lady?"

Head lifting up to stare at blue strands, Teresa's lip quivered with fear at her new revelation. "I-- I just want to go home." She had to go back and do her effort for the war, plus she actually had the comfort of knowing everything that was happening there.

"No one wants to be in Muncie. Are you a freshman? Are you lost?"

“Please, I just--” The words caught in her throat. A sob broke out as the visual stimuli of unfamiliar surroundings overwhelmed. Everything seemed more real when she wasn’t sitting on the ground.

“Here, let’s get you inside. Were you laying on the ground?”

The young woman lost in time backed up slowly until she fell backwards against an unforeseen sign. When she lifted up her head to read the sign, all she saw was *Administrative Building* before her vision began to spin. She couldn’t tell if she couldn’t see well because of the sudden headache or if she was just still suffering from the flash at the operating station.

“Oh God, you’re-- you hit your head--”

“Brent, you should call 911--”

“Ma’am, can you hear me? Ma’am--”

Was the sky always this gray? Or was that because of the factories nearby? It’d explain the puffy, gray clouds.

Stars decorated her sight. Was she on the wet ground again? The skunk smell from before was replaced with a coppery smell.

“Yes, her head is *bleeding*-- She’s in front of the administrative building on University. You’re right here, just-- you could literally run out here and be faster--”

Teresa wouldn’t be taken in! She needed to go home and see everything again! Getting onto her feet once more, she gathered up her skirts and started away, stumbling onto the pavement and continuing onward. Everything was crooked, but if she could just make it around the corner of the building and continue down the path, surely she’d find the way back home.

“Oh God, fuck-- she’s running away.”

“We need to get her before she hurts herself--”

She continued on, tripping over her feet on the black pavement still moving. The trees around her had a familiar red tint, and Teresa was finally noticing the nip that autumn gave her.

“Lady, you need to go to the hospital!”

“I need to go home!” Her feet were already beginning to ache; saddle shoes were definitely comfortable for work in the factory, but not for running. She’d remember that if she were to ever actually *get home*.

Weaving through the crowd at the four-way stop wasn’t exactly the easiest part. All of these people staring at the pokey-things in their hands were enough to keep them from leaving their spot. It was utterly frustrating.

A weird chirping-like beep startled her from the right, causing her to turn around in a complete circle. Some strangers had stared at her from behind with wide eyes, the ones that were in front of her stared at their devices. But when the chirping started, they all stampeded onto the streets, moving across as the automobiles remained in place.

“Ma’am, you need to stay on this side of the Scramble Light--”

One hand clamped around her wrist. Teresa screamed before trying to pull her arm around frantically. She couldn’t get home if she wasn’t being taken away.

“You’re *bleeding*, lady.” Blue Hair grabbed her other wrist. “You’re going to a hospital.”

“*No!* No.” Home. “I need to go home-- I need--” Had her head been hurting like this since she arrived here? Flashing stars decorated her vision. “I need to go home--” It was a mantra.

Another alarming noise started in the distance.

“They’re just *now* starting up the ambulance?”

“I’m going to die here.”

Teresa received a mixed reaction from the Red Hair man as he kept his grip on her.

“You’re going to the hospital. Why aren’t you listening?”

The sun started peeking through a grey cloud. The whining of the alarming noise got closer, the volume of it hurting her ears.

“I need to go home.”

“Oh *come on!* The moment we try to be nice for *once*, and it’s some freaked-out freshman who dresses weird and has flipped the fuck out--”

“Brent!”

Her breath seemed huskier than before. Shallower, maybe? Wow, her head *and* her lungs hurt. If she actually had control of her arms, she could figure out why her head was throbbing uncontrollably and maybe hold her chest for a moment or two. But *no*, there was no way in Hell that that would happen in Hell.

Red and blue lights combined with the white stars in her vision.

“Maybe she’s just cross-faded? Or high on crack? She needs our help. She needs to come back to reality--”

“*Home*. I need to go back home and do my *job!*”

When the flashing automobile stopped in front of her, the two colorful strangers, let go of her. If she didn’t feel so wobbly on her feet, maybe she’d run away again. So instead she finally moved her hand up to the back of her head, only to feel the stick still stuck in her hair and a damp patch of hair as well. Looking down at her hand, Teresa recognized the coppery smell: her head was bleeding.

Two more sets of hands grabbed her, guiding her to a rolling bed to lie down on.

Struggling as the hands, Teresa found that she seemed to be able to sway them to leave her alone.

A mask over her face brought a breath of fresh air.

Without a warning, Teresa's vision turned black.

Bracken Library¹²

UNIVERSE: What Is?

No Matter the Cost



(Campus legends say that the architecture of Bracken was inspired by books being stacked side-by-side of each other...)

¹² Original picture before editing: @ballstatelibraries. "Good morning!" *Instagram*. 20 June 2016.
https://www.instagram.com/p/BG3_fwJsN/

Bell Tower

UNIVERSE: What Is?

“We Fly”

we fly
we soar
in SATs
in scores

we were the overachievers who wanted the grade
never for the fame
nor fortune

but for validations

you see
we kids flew from the nest
with or without a safety nest

we nestled in bell towers
in dorm rooms
with the hope that our collections
would suffice as rest

we hoped that honors would give us another cord
to add to this nest
we’ve created for ourselves

because for us,
college is a privilege
not an honor
nor a requirement

but the way I see it
from the ground looking up
there’s a lot of debt to go around
and bills to fill the nest

we fly
we soar

high above the rest
honors may be part of the bill
but the scores won't pay for debts.

Frog Baby
UNIVERSE: What If?

Frog Family



(Original picture with sweated Frog Baby taken in Winter of 2017; additional Frog Baby picture taken in Spring 2017. Edited with pixlr.com.)

About the Author

Taylor Townsend is a senior english and telecommunications double major at Ball State University with an honors college acceptance. In this thesis she is turning in, she hopes to graduate with an honors diploma along with her Bachelor's in Art due to her concentrations of creative writing and video production.

During her time at Ball State University, Taylor has participated in student groups such as BSU Tonight, Cardinal Catholic, and Sigma Tau Delta. Likewise, she has discovered her love for filmmaking, production, and social media works.

Upon graduation on May 4th, 2019, Taylor will be traveling to Orlando, FL, as a participant of the Disney College Program for Walt Disney World, where she hopes to make the connections necessary to find a job within Walt Disney Studios. Likewise, now that her schoolwork is completed, she hopes to continue her newly-made company, TNT Productions, thrive with the idea that diversity is good and should be celebrated.

Along with all of the previously-made acknowledgements, she would also like to thank her support system of BSU faculty and community members of her student organizations for giving her encouragements and opportunities. Even if she does not want to stay in Muncie, she will miss being in such close proximity of friendships such as these.

College does that, sometimes.

Final Note

In mid-April, I had this realization as I was walking through West Quad on campus that this was not only my last, big project to do as a college student, but also that it was probably my last time to really reflect on the beauty that any place can bring.

And it's weird, realizing that this is my last time being in this version of the universe; I would no longer be a college student after May 4th. I wouldn't have a reason to stay in Muncie unless a job opportunity exists out here that I'm interested in... I was about to travel outside of this pocket universe for the last time.

As the tenth Doctor would say: "I don't want to go. I don't want to forget this."

But it's time for change.

I wish for any Pocket Universe Traveler who comes across these studies (or my New York City writings, or my future writings, or, or, or--) to realize the precious value of time. It's such a wasted commodity.

I wish for whoever decides to participate as a Pocket Universe Traveler does not lose their sense of curiosity. While recording each "landmark," there should be a sense of appreciation and learning in the moment. There's only so much time spent in each universe and in life itself.

Overall, this work has become my love letter to Muncie, Indiana: I love you and hate you, and only I can say this as someone who has spent so much time with you, both physically and intellectually. I hope you thrive and grow with each individual's time spent here.

And yes, I hope for that for myself and for my audience as well.

May you all grow with each universe you explore.

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